

WHAT MAY INFLUENCE STUDENTS  
TO DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL?

MASTER'S PROJECT

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose for the Study

In today's society, there are people whose lives are hindered because they do not have a high school diploma. These people may be unemployed or have lost advancement opportunities because of this deficiency. According to Dorn (1993), the stigma about not having a diploma has developed in the last several decades. In the past, it was not necessary to have a diploma in order to hold a job. It has become a requirement for many jobs; therefore, the employer could use this characteristic to decide if a person should be taken out of the ranks for job consideration. Thus, more people have completed the requirements for a high school diploma than in the past.

Why should a study be completed on high school dropouts? First, many studies completed on students who have dropped out of school have focused upon the students who have left school to never return. These students have answered questions, and the answers have been analyzed. These after-the-fact studies determine what influenced those who have already left school. Because these reasons are collected after the action of dropping out, the Reducing Dropouts Advisory Committee (1988) believed that educators should be skeptical of the reasons since social acceptance, rationalization, or avoidance of the real issue could occur

and not be truthful in scope. Smith, Tseng, and Mink (1971) developed a scale using dropouts. To answer the question, "How good is retrospective information?" they determined that they would have to administer the scale to a group of seventh graders and do a five year longitudinal study (p. 36). Thus, the author felt there was a need to do more study on students who are still in school to determine what would influence them to leave school without graduating.

Second, the literature expressed that more research needs to be done. In "A Study of High School Dropouts," Bearden (1989) stated, "How to confront the issue of the dropout effectively is still not known" (p. 144).

Third, throughout the author's teaching career, she has had students who stated that they do not care about having good grades, good attendance, or passing the proficiency tests because they do not intend to graduate from school once they were legally allowed to quit. The author wanted to understand these students better. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lisko and Fernandez (1989) believed that "educators need to understand the diversity of the at-risk population they are serving" (p. 58). The educator needed to understand the interrelationship between personal circumstances and the students' school experiences.

Fourth, the author had the desire to know if proficiency testing may influence a student to leave school. This desire was first instilled while the author was taking

a special education class. The issue of students being exempt from testing brought up the issue of proficiency testing and the idea of excellence. The professor made the statement that proficiency testing and higher standards would cause more students to leave school without graduating. Crawley (1988) supported this idea with her statement "our push toward excellence probably will have the effect of increasing the number of dropouts" (p. 3). She believed that high demands should be placed upon these students who are potential dropouts, but that they also needed the support necessary to "help them meet the demands in these classrooms" (p. 4).

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to identify the most important factors which may influence secondary students to drop out of school before graduating.

#### Assumptions

In this study, the author had to make several assumptions. First, the author had to assume that the instruments will measure what they were designed to measure. The first instrument asked students to rank-order from most important to least important reasons for dropping out of school. These reasons came from the literature. The second instrument was a questionnaire which asked the student to answer "yes," "no," or "maybe" to a list of reasons for dropping out of school. The second instrument was created to be similar to the instrument used by

Gastright and Ahmad (1988). This instrument had 42 specific reasons which the subject had to check "No Cause," "Some Cause," or "Important Cause". The third instrument was a semantic differential which measured the students' attitude toward dropping out. The semantic differential was created to be similar to an instrument used by Boshier (1972). His instrument differed in that his had 23 adjective pairs and used pictures of the concept. Second, the author assumed that the items contain the necessary factors for those students who participated in the study. Finally, the author assumed that the students honestly answered the items and seriously did the task.

#### Limitations

One limitation for this study was that the students surveyed were from a limited geographical area in the state. The students were from a rural area which would prove difficult to generalize the results to students who live in an urban area. Also, the sample size was under one-hundred students, so the findings might not be as accurate in comparison to a larger population. Another limitation was that the rank-order questionnaire had only ten reasons for dropping out of school and may not include choices which fit the students' reasons. Another limitation might exist with the language of the forced - choice questionnaire. The last limitation was that the surveys were given toward the end of the school year, and the students might not have concentrated as well.



## Definition of Terms

At-Risk means a student has the attributes to be a potential dropout.

Dropout means a student withdraws from school and does not receive a diploma for reasons other than death or transfer to another school (Barber and McClellan, 1987).

Secondary includes students who are in grades 9-12.

Factors are conditions which help bring about a result.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### History of the Dropout

The idea of students leaving school without receiving a diploma was not always a major concern. There was worry about students leaving school early, but it did not cause a big uproar until the 1950's and 1960's. Dorn (1993) in "Origins of the Dropout Problem" stated that United States citizens have worried about poor school attendance and its affect since the beginning of the republic. People did want children to receive some education. In the period between 1880 and 1920, compulsory attendance laws were created for most states.

In his book Progress and Attendance of Rural School Children in Delaware, Cooper (1930) discussed compulsory attendance laws and how trustees and local courts did not enforce these attendance laws. Cooper (1930) cited two sources which showed that enforcement of school attendance was difficult and not effective with local officers and local courts. The first source was John Frederick Bender who stated:

'The compulsory attendance law reads nicely and is effective in the large towns and cities, but in the rural sections it is a dead letter, and will remain so as long as the initiative for the enforcement is in the hands of the trustees. They simply will not

swear out warrants for the arrest of their neighbors' (p. 2).

The second source is a South Dakota report which stated:

'Almost entirely the enforcement of the compulsory attendance law is in the hands of the local authorities, who often are not interested in education and in some cases are not in sympathy with it. Hence they do not see their duty clearly when it comes to taking active steps to see that children of school age are regularly in attendance at school' (p. 2).

To give credibility to his statement, he referred to the period between 1907 and 1916 and the period's attendance conditions.

Around 1910, conditions of the schools also did not encourage students to attend school. Children were not happy in schools. They had to worry about corporal punishment and worry about being ridiculed. Students found school to be monotonous, dull, and hard. It was hard because the standards for students were very high. The high standards created an inadequate curriculum for most students. The curriculum moved at a fast pace, and the bright students did well. This pace caused average students to fall behind while those students who were unable to do the work had no chance. The result was that fifty percent of the elementary students dropped out of school. (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989)

In 1913, a factory inspector named Helen Todd asked 500 children who worked in factories and went to school if given the opportunity would they go to school full time? Four hundred-twelve of the children told her that they "'preferred factory labor to the monotony, humiliation and even sheer cruelty that they experienced in school'" (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989, p. 31).

According to Dorn (1993), the literature on dropouts written at the turn-of-the-century was not a very large body of literature. Instead, the literature was concerned with "anxieties about withdrawals meshed with larger concerns about the relationship between school and work and about appropriate sex roles for adolescents" (p. 358). These issues were the foundation for the debates during the Progressive Era. These debates were concerned with vocational education. The Progressive Era wanted schools to train the students for work to "link schools and labor markets" (p. 359). Dorn (1993) stated that the Progressive Era also had no coherent body of literature on dropouts.

After World War II, the concern was National Security. Schools were mentioned in this endeavor. Admiral Hyman Rickover felt "high schools were failing to train the technical elite that could keep America secure from the Soviet threat" (Dorn, 1993, p. 359). In 1947 James Bryan Conant, Harvard University President, told a congressional panel "that he wanted the National Science Foundation to foster the training of talented high school students in

order to strengthen national security" (p. 359). In 1956, Daniel Snapp thought that the national security needed to depend upon "universal high school graduation" and that everyone not just the technical elite should be trained (p. 360).

In August, 1963, President John F. Kennedy brought to national attention the school dropout when he made available \$250,000 from the Presidential Emergency Fund. Guidance counselors were to use the money to work on the problem on the local level. The National Education Association also had a campaign focusing on the dropout problem with the slogan "Each One Reach One" (Nachman, Getson, & Odgers, 1964).

The Soviet Union with Sputnik caused America to have a "crisis in science and technology" (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1989, p. 137). The post-Sputnik era contained reform in education. The main push of the reform was improving education quality. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 "upgraded schools' science programs and facilities and improved teachers by providing fellowship funds" (p. 137). The National Science Foundation received more money for educational activities from the Eisenhower administration.

In the literature, concern about dropouts decreased throughout the 1970's (Dorn, 1993). The problem of the dropout did not have national attention like it did in the 1960's. Other problems were at the forefront. A few

of these problems included school vandalism and violence, money issues, and more emphasis on those children with handicaps (U. S. President's National Advisory Council, 1975).

The debate over excellence increased in the early 1980's. The increase in the standards may have the consequence of increasing the dropout rate. Brodinsky and Keough (1989) referred to two views on this issue. First, Harold Hodgkinson, Institute for Educational Leadership, believed that the dropout rate would increase if graduation standards were raised. Second, Samuel G. Sava, National Association of Elementary School Principals believed that school reforms are "being placed on the backs of children" (p. 77). The remedial and financial resources are not being provided to help the students with the increase in standards.

#### Myths about Dropping Out of School

Hamby (1989) stated "the problem of students dropping out of school is real and that schools must take ownership of the problem and begin [to work on] solutions" (p. 21). Hamby (1989) believed that the myths about dropping out of school must be dispelled before this process could occur. In the literature, the author found several myths.

Hamby's first myth is that there is not a dropout problem. He believed that as long as students leave school without a diploma, there is a dropout problem. Greene (1966) stated that "in the history of public education

in America, the dropout has not been viewed as a major educational problem" (p. 1). The dropout became a major educational problem because "the sheer number of dropouts and the facts of our economic life coupled with great technological advances which cause us to view it with alarm" (p. 1). Greene (1966) gave seven factors that makes the dropout situation a problem:

- 1) Although the proportion of dropouts is decreasing, a greater number of young people are leaving school today.
- 2) Our present and developing economy requires greater degree of skill than was previously required in our labor force.
- 3) The age at which a person entering the labor force is rising.
- 4) Too great an experience of frustration and failure deprives the student of the incentive to succeed.
- 5) The dropout may become a candidate for every program of social welfare throughout his life.
- 6) There are few places in our society for the dropout.
- 7) The dropout represents a major educational and social failure. (p. 2)

Hamby (1989) disagreed with those who do not believe there is a problem because no matter what drop out rate is used "any dropout rate represents an incalculable loss of human potential and a staggering economic cost to society" (p. 21). Here is a chart to show the dropout

rates for those persons 14 to 24 years old for five different years over the past 26 years.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of dropouts (1000)</u>	<u>Percent of Population</u>
1970	4670	12.2
1980	5212	12.0
1985	4456	10.6
1990	3854	10.1
1993	3472	9.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, P20-479. (p. 174)

Greene (1966) suggested that another myth was the dropout problem is a relatively new problem. Greene (1966) reported that the "drop out is not a new or rare problem... It has been, and is one of the facts of our educational process and it will undoubtedly continue to be a fact until high school graduation becomes compulsory" (p. 1). Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) reported that concern over the dropout problem has occurred since the turn of the century to the present. They reported that since the start of schooling students have dropped out of schools. Back in 1900, 90 percent of the males did not graduate. In 1920, this dropped by 10 percent to have 80 percent drop out of high school. In the 1950's, the percent of males not finishing fell below 50 percent. In the mid 1960's this drop out rate stabilized at 25 percent (p. 30). Zeller (1966) stated:

The drop out problem is not new. At the turn of the century, 85-90 percent of all students entering high school left before graduation. . . . it is not the



dropout problem that is new, but the concern about students who leave school before completing their education (p. 11).

Hamby (1989) believed that the myth that some children just do not belong in school needed to be dispelled. Hamby (1989) stated "Our education system is based upon the principle of universal free public schooling. Although some children have more difficulty adjusting to school than others, they all deserve every chance we can give them to succeed" (p. 21). Legislation has been passed to help insure that students with handicaps would receive an education. In 1975, the passage of P. L. 94-142 required "states to provide all handicapped students with a free, appropriate education suited to their individual needs" (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas, 1986, p. 138). This legislation, The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act in 1975, helped to provide funding for education for all children with handicaps and brought the issue national recognition.

NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell suggested that the attitudes about those believed to be ineducable need to be changed. One must not believe that a child can not learn because of race, economic background or other characteristics. "We must communicate to these children that their background is no excuse not to learn" (Brodinsky & Keough, 1989, p. 54).

Schools do not cause dropouts and can do nothing to keep children from dropping out of school is another myth from Hamby (1989). "There can be no denying that schools are partly responsible for the dropout" (Greene, 1966, p. 196). Teachers do not realize their part and blame "the home situation, the environment, poverty, other students, the community, and even the student himself, but not once do they recognize their contribution and responsibility" (p. 196). Zeller (1966) believed that teachers do not want to work with students who won't succeed and "want to work only with students of their own social class who do well in school" ( p. 13). Zeller (1966) continued with "to persuade a drop out to return to school is not necessarily a solution if he returns to the same situation that he left.... If school conditions remain unchanged, a returnee has no better chance of succeeding a second time than when he first enrolled" (p. 13).

Those counselors who have tried to get students to come back to finish have a 70 percent drop out rate for these students. At-risk students can be discouraged by school level practices. School structure needs to be changed to "respond to the diversity of students and to help [them] achieve common goals" of feeling successful and competent, having an identity and learning skills to become a "good worker, parent, and citizen" (p. 27). Hamby (1989) thought that schools are partially responsible for the problem.

If we can believe what dropouts themselves tell us about why they left school, failure, boredom, and loss of self-esteem stand high on their lists. To set standards for young people and then blame the failure entirely on them, their families, or some element outside of school is an abdication of our roles as educators (p. 22).

Zeller (1996) believed that misconceptions about dropouts can come from people believing the myth that reasons for leaving school fall into specific categories. A list of characteristics that causes students to dropout has been created and categorized creating a stereotype of the dropout. However, there are many students who drop out who do not fall into any of the categories. Zeller (1966) stated:

Unfortunately, such a list fails to explain the exceptions, and does not tell why a characteristic tends to produce a dropout, although the reason may be implied. Furthermore, such a list does not differentiate between the symptoms of gradual deterioration in the relations of a child with his school and those events that might be changed and thereby hold the child until he is graduated (p. 11).

Given by Zeller (1966), the last myth is to require school attendance to solve the dropout problem. "Some educators feel that the obvious solution to the dropout

problem is to require all students to remain in school until graduation, or to convince the students, themselves, to stay in school. High school teachers shudder at the prospect of keeping 17, 18, or 19-year-old students in school when they have no desire to remain" (Zeller, 1966, p. 13). Greene (1966) agreed with Zeller (1966):

There are those who would argue that the problem of the dropout would disappear if states would raise the school leaving age.... Perhaps it would be possible for each state to force students to stay in school until they are eighteen. However, this does not solve the problem. There is no guarantee that the students who would drop out will graduate merely because they must stay in school longer (p. 202).

#### Student Reasons for Dropping Out

One myth mentioned diagnostic categories of dropping out of school. Even though Hamby believed that this myth needed to be dispelled, we can use the information to look at each student on an individual basis. The reasons for dropping out of school can fall into one of three categories: school related, economic, or personal reasons. Many students give reasons for dropping out of school that can be grouped as school related. These give reasons which include poor performance, dislike of school, expulsion or suspension, conflict with teacher, peer problems, school too dangerous, and transfer from original school area (Reducing Dropouts Handbook Advisory Committee, 1988).

A second group of students give reasons for dropping out that are economic in nature. This category includes the reasons of the desire to work, financial difficulties, home responsibilities, and local employment opportunities.

The last category is personal reasons. This includes homelife, family problems, pregnancy, childcare problems, marriage, health (physical and mental), and educational and occupational aspirations.

### Characteristics of Dropouts

Greene (1966) tells us that there are many factors found in studies. None of these factors individually or as a group can account for each case. Yet, these factors can give us clue to the potential dropout and can be grouped.

One set of characteristics of potential dropouts is school-related factors. Some of these school-related factors include: ineffective teaching styles, disproportionate discipline, inappropriate textbooks and courses, emphasis on memorization and recitation, higher graduation standards without providing help, repeated school failure, and lack of at-risk counseling (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989).

A second set of characteristics of potential dropouts is personal factors. Some of these personal factors include: lack of life goals, low self esteem, poor emotional health, no hope for the future, no self discipline, peer pressure, premature sexual activity, and drug or alcohol

abuse (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989).

A third set of characteristics centers upon the students home life. The home life factors include many parental acts: divorce, apathy for child, neglect and abuse of child, drug and alcohol abuse, work schedule, dropped out of school, and negative attitude towards schooling. The trauma of a family catastrophe, the lack of proper role models, and lack of discipline are also characteristics (Brodinsky and Keough, 1989).

Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) stated that these "three sets of factors are interrelated and interact in ways that are not yet well understood" (p. 26). It is assumed that a student's decision to leave is affected by situations or influences and that these same situations or influences will not have much effect on other students. "The complexity of these casual factors suggests that students dropout for different reasons at different times" (p. 26).

#### Dropout Prevention Interventions

In Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support, Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) stated that when creating intervention policies or practices, the diverse factors creating the dropout situation needs to be viewed and allowed in the programs. They believe it is essential to design the intervention to respond to the actual characteristics and educational needs of the student. If the needs and characteristics

are not allowed, the intervention will be inappropriate. The group also believed that generic programs designed to be "responsive to all potential dropouts" will not be responsive to all potential dropouts since there is diversity in the dropout situation (p. 52). Intervention diversity will increase the holding power of schools

Intervention can be successful. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) stated that "the success of a particular intervention strategy is due in part to its timeliness and its match with particular types of students with particular problems" (p. 26). Archer and Dresden (1986) stated that some successful programs give personal attention and make students feel as part of a family. There will be small pupil-teacher ratios, flexible rules and scheduling, and specialized curriculum.

In Reducing Dropouts in Ohio schools, nine features for an intervention program's success were given. Successful dropout programs offer student support services, emphasize an individualized approach to instruction, include basic skills remediation, employ community-based learning, provide employment related activities, offer high school credit for alternative courses, stress interagency cooperation, provide support to teacher, administrators and parents and orient students for success by improving students self esteem (p. 27).

The OERI Urban Superintendents Network (1987) has six strategies which can keep students in school and help

the students to be successful while they are there. The first strategy is to intervene early. When a student shows signs of difficulty provide help before the student has a chance to become frustrated and lose self-esteem. The second strategy is to create a positive school climate. A third strategy is to set realistic high expectations and to give the support necessary for at-risk students to meet these expectations. The fourth strategy is to select and develop strong teachers because they influence the students' education and attitude toward school. The fifth strategy is to provide a broad range of instructional programs to accommodate students with diverse needs. The last strategy is to initiate collaborative efforts to develop and administer dropout prevention programs.

There are several dropout prevention/interventions. One dropout intervention is tutoring. Crawley (1988) believes to help students be able to succeed with higher standards then tutoring needs to be made available to those students who need the extra help. Several different groups of people could be tutors. These people include teachers, parents, other students, senior citizens, community members, and computers (Brodinsky & Keough, 1989).

A second dropout intervention is counseling. School counselors could be trained to look for the at-risk students and create interventions for the students. Other students, parents, and former dropouts can be trained as counselors to help these students. Counseling can be done using the



telephone or in a special room. Greene (1966) gave six basic concepts for guidance. It needs to relate to the curriculum, be based on knowing and understanding student behavior, needs to help student develop socially and personally, use a variety of techniques, be individual, and be inseparable from the teaching.

Dropout prevention can occur through an approach which is work related. There are several ways this can be accomplished. For students who work the school could offer a flexible schedule for when classes are offered. For example, classes could be offered in the evenings or throughout the entire calendar year. Another approach is that the school could have students career shadow working people in the community and offer career and job fairs which have business and industry representatives giving information on possible career choices (Brodinsky & Keough, 1989). A third approach would be to have students trained out in the community for half the day and be in the classroom the other half of the day (Crawley, 1988).

A fourth dropout prevention approach involves the students' parents. Some parents can become advocates for students to help the principals and teachers recognize the problems of specific students. Parents can also support students and help them to continue their education. They could operate truancy hotlines to call homes of truant students and call when students are seen outside of school during school time. The parents could come in to be guest

speakers about jobs, study skills, work habits and attitudes needed for success. Schools could have early intervention by having education programs for parents that teach parenting skills, communication skills, and how to help their student develop self-esteem (Brodinsky & Keough, 1989).

Self (1985) gave a list of key dropout intervention strategies. These included individualized instruction, improving student-teacher relationships, helping students develop a positive attitude toward school, teaching basic academic skills, group counseling, and extra-curricular activity involvement. Hamby (1989) gave activities in eight areas which school can use to decrease the number of dropouts. These areas are awareness, attendance, achievement, attitude, atmosphere, adaptation, alternatives and advocacy.

## CHAPTER III

### PROCEDURE

#### Subjects

The subjects for this study included thirty-seven tenth graders. Thirty of these tenth graders were sixteen years old. Three of the subjects were fifteen years old while four of them were the age of seventeen. Seventeen of the subjects were male while the other twenty were female. Half of the subjects had a job outside of school hours. Every subject except for four students reported that graduating from school was important to them. Of these four subjects, two reported that they believed that their parents do not care if they do or do not finish high school. Every other subject in the tenth grade group reported that they believed that their parents want them to finish high school. Only eight students reported having been failed or held back one grade before the seventh grade. The other twenty-nine have not failed a grade.

The subjects also included the author's class of math one. Math one is the lowest level of math for the math department. A freshman would be taking the class for the first time, a sophomore for the second time, and any junior would be taking the class for the third time. Both groups of subjects were asked to fill out the instruments to help the author with a study about students dropping out of high school. The subjects were told the purpose of the

study, that the information would be considered in group data form, and that no names would be used. The question of whether they had to do the instruments was never brought into discussion by the author or the subjects. In the math class, the author had thirteen students fill out the instruments. Five of the subjects were in the ninth grade. One subject was in the tenth grade, and seven were in the eleventh grade. There were two fourteen year olds, one fifteen year old, three sixteen year olds, three seventeen year olds and four at age eighteen. Nine of the subjects were male, and four were female. Six of the seven juniors reported having failed or been held back one year before the seventh grade. One of the ninth grade students reported having failed or been held back one grade while another ninth grade student reported having failed two or more grades. Every subject in the math class believed it is important to himself or herself to graduate from high school and thought their parents believed the same thing. Ten subjects believed that they will be able to graduate from school while two believe it is probable. Six subjects seldom (1-2 days a week) do homework while six do homework often (3-4 days a week) and one does homework five days a week. Eight of these subjects hold a job outside of school hours.

## Setting

School. The subjects are students in a junior/senior high school building which contains grades 7 through 12. This junior/ senior high school has approximately 480 students, 33 teachers and one principal.

Community. The school system is located in a rural county area of southwest Ohio. The school system has three buildings: a primary (grades k-3), an intermediate (grades 4-6), and a junior/ senior his school (grades 7-12).

## Data Collection

Construction of Instrument. Because the author wanted to have a complete study, the author chose to do more than one instrument. The author administered two questionnaires and a semantic differential. The first questionnaire asked the subject to consider ten reasons for a student to want to drop out of high school. The subject was asked to think to him or herself "Could this cause me to want to drop of high school?" This first questionnaire had forced choices with three responses "yes," "no," and "maybe." The ten reasons were desire to work, fail the ninth grade proficiency test, have difficulty learning, failure to see the relevance of education to life, failing grades failure of courses, conflict with teacher, teachers do not care, pregnancy or fathering a child, plan to take the G.E.D. and expelled from school. On the second questionnaire, for these same ten reasons for dropping

out of high school, the subjects were asked to rank from 1 through 10 the most important to least important. The number one was the most important reason for a student to want to drop out of high school while the number ten would be the least important reason. The semantic differential was used to measure the students' attitude toward dropping out of school. For the semantic differential, pairs of bipolar adjectives were arranged at opposite ends of five point scales. The concept "Dropping out of High School" was at the top. The students were to rate the concept according to how they perceive it or feel toward it at the present moment by placing an X somewhere along each of the five scales.

These three instruments complement one another. The forced choice questionnaire and the rank-order questionnaire have the same dropout reasons. The "yes" responses should be found as more important in the rank order questionnaire and the "no" responses lower in rank. This should give the instrument validity. The forced choice questionnaire should help to determine the reasons of the rank questionnaire which apply to the subjects. The semantic differential would validate the other two questionnaires and decide how well the other results can be generalized.

The instruments were reviewed by five teachers and one student who had returned to school after having dropped out three years earlier. The review gave the author several

changes for the instruments. For the demographic information sheet, the author included the number of days for question four, clarification on question number 11, as well as rewording on questions 7, 8, and 9. The review also helped to determine the order for the instruments. For example, the "yes," "no," "maybe" questionnaire was the last instrument for the review and became the first instrument for the subjects. The semantic differential lost two adjective pairs and had a few adjective pairs switch sides on the scale. They were field tested by a group of five juniors. The semantic differential average was forty-three. These students ordered the reasons from most important to least important: 1) have difficulty learning, 2) failing grades - failure of courses, 3) pregnancy or fathering a child, 4) failed the ninth grade proficiency test, 5) desire to work, 6) plan to take the G.E.D. 7) expelled from school 8) failure to see the relevance of education to life 9) teachers do not care 10) conflict with teachers. Two students had all no reasons checked. One student had four yes, one no and five maybe responses checked. Another had one yes, one maybe and the rest as no checked. The fifth one had checked two yes, 2 maybe, and the rest as no.

Administration of the Instrument. The items were administered by the author to the tenth grade subjects during homeroom and to her students during math class. This occurred the week of May 17, 1996.

## CHAPTER IV

### Presentation of the Results

For each of the instruments, the author has presented the data in table form. The rank-order questionnaire results are in Table One and Table Two found on the next two pages. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix D. For each of the ten reasons why a student would want to drop out of school, the rank given by each subject was added to make a total sum for each reason. Once every dropout reason had its rank totaled, the author took the sums and ordered them from the smallest sum to the largest sum. This process was also used for the male subjects and female subjects total sum and rank order. This corresponds to the direction on the questionnaire given to the students where they had to rank from most important to least important the given reasons why a student would want to drop out of school. The smaller the sum the more important the reason to the subjects. The author used rows and columns. Each row contains a reason for a student to want to drop out of high school. Table One presents the results for the tenth grade students. Table Two presents the results for the math students. The three main columns were divided into results for the entire group (ALL), results for male subjects (MALE), and results for female subjects (FEMALE). These columns were divided into the two sub-columns of the sum of the group of subjects



TABLE ONE  
RESULTS OF THE RANK-ORDER QUESTIONNAIRE

TENTH GRADE STUDENTS	All				MALE				FEMALE			
	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK
REASON												
Desire to work	212	7	74	5.5	138	8						
Fail the ninth grade proficiency test	263	10	109	10	154	10						
Have difficulty learning	149	3	63	1	86	3						
Failure to see the relevance of education to life	166	4	65	2	101	5						
Failing grades - Failure of courses	169	5	73	4	96	4						
Conflict with teachers	213	8	83	9	130	7						
Teachers do not care	197	6	70	3	127	6						
Pregnancy or fathering a child	141	1	82	8	59	1						
Plan to take the G.E.D.	214	9	74	5.5	140	9						
Expelled from school	144	2	75	7	69	2						

TABLE TWO  
RESULTS OF THE RANK-ORDER QUESTIONNAIRE

MATH STUDENTS

REASON	ALL		MALE		FEMALE	
	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK	SUM	RANK
Desire to work	52	2	27	1	25	9
Fail the ninth grade proficiency test	103	10	75	10	28	10
Have difficulty learning	65	5	48	5	17	5.5
Failure to see the relevance of education to life	66	6	49	6	17	5.5
Failing grades - Failure of courses	46	1	41	2	5	1
Conflict with teachers	74	9	61	9	13	4
Teachers do not care	72	8	51	7.5	21	8
Pregnancy or fathering a child	59	4	46	3.5	13	3
Plan to take the G.E.D.	70	7	51	7.5	19	7
Expelled from school	53	3	46	3.5	7	2

ranks (SUM) and the rank of these sums (RANK).

The forced-choice questionnaire with three choices "Yes," "No," and "Maybe," for each drop out reason is found in appendix C. The results for this questionnaire is found in Table Three and Table Four on the next two pages. These tables have the data showing the frequency for each drop out reason in percent form. The author found the frequency of the responses by using a frequency table. The author took each frequency, divided the frequency by the total number of responses for each drop out reason and multiplied the result by 100 to find the percent. This process was used separately for the tenth grade subjects and the mathematics students. The tables have rows and columns. Each row contains one reason for a student to drop out of high school. Table Three has the results for the tenth grade students. Table Four has the results for the math students. Each main column corresponds to the choice of response "Yes," "No," and "Maybe."

The semantic differential is found in appendix E. The semantic differential results are presented in five stem-and-leaf displays and in Table Five. For each adjective pair, the subject had to place an X on one of the five given scales. For the concept, one adjective of the pair was the positive and the other adjective the negative pole.

TABLE THREE

## FREQUENCY TABLE FOR FORCED-CHOICE QUESTIONNAIRE

TENTH GRADE STUDENTS			
REASON	YES	NO	MAYBE
Desire to work	24.3	59.5	16.2
Fail the ninth grade proficiency test	8.1	89.2	2.7
Have difficulty learning	18.9	46	35.1
Failure to see the relevance of education to life	35.1	54.1	10.8
Failing grades - Failure of courses	21.6	59.5	18.9
Conflict with teachers	21.6	64.9	13.5
Teachers do not care	27.8	52.8	19.4
Pregnancy or fathering a child	30.6	47.2	22.2
Plan to take the G.E.D.	21.6	62.2	16.2
Expelled from school	32.4	48.7	18.9

TABLE FOUR

## FREQUENCY TABLE FOR FORCED-CHOICE QUESTIONNAIRE

MATH STUDENTS			
REASON	YES	NO	MAYBE
Desire to work	30.7	38.5	30.8
Fail the ninth grade proficiency test	0	92.3	7.7
Have difficulty learning	15.4	69.2	15.4
Failure to see the relevance of education to life	15.4	61.5	23.1
Failing grades - Failure of courses	46.2	30.8	23.0
Conflict with teachers	23.0	46.2	30.8
Teachers do not care	23.1	53.8	23.1
Pregnancy or fathering a child	15.4	53.8	30.8
Plan to take the G.E.D.	7.7	61.5	30.8
Expelled from school	23.1	69	7.7

## ADJECTIVES

### Negative Pole

difficult  
irresponsible  
unsuccessful  
foolish  
unimportant  
sad  
unpleasant  
worthless  
complicated  
painful

### Positive Pole

easy  
responsible  
successful  
wise  
important  
happy  
pleasant  
valuable  
simple  
pleasurable

The closer a subject was to the positive pole adjectives the more the subject perceived dropping out of school as a positive idea. The author gave each of the scales a value between one and five.

### negative

### positive

Irresponsible    5   4   3   2   1   Responsible

The author found the sum of each subject by adding the scale value for each of the adjective pairs. These sums are in the stem-and-leaf displays. The first digit of each sum is the stem, and the second digit is the leaf. Table Five shows the averages for the semantic differential. The average was found for the tenth grade males, tenth grade females, math males, math females, and all subjects. The average was found by adding the sums and dividing by the number of subjects.

## Discussion of the Results

### Rank-Order Questionnaire Results

Looking at the results of the tenth grade subjects, the range of the rank sums of the male subjects was 46; the female subjects was 95; and the entire group was 122. As a group the tenth grade males ranked the reason "Have difficulty learning" as their most important reason for a student to drop out and ranked "Failing the ninth grade proficiency test" as number ten. As a group, the tenth grade females ranked the reason "Pregnancy or fathering a child" as their most important reason for a student to drop out of school and ranked "Failing the ninth grade proficiency test" as number ten. Notice both groups chose the same reason for the least important reason. This might be attributed to the fact that most of these subjects have passed all parts of the ninth grade proficiency except for the three people who answered yes as it being a reason for them to drop out of school. Notice also both groups agree on the number four ranking of "Failing grades- Failure of courses."

Looking at the math students, the range of the sums of the group was 57; of the male subjects, 48; the female subjects, 23. As a group, the male subjects in the mathematics class ranked "The desire to work" as the most important reason for a student to drop out of school and "Failed the ninth grade proficiency test" as the least important reason. As a group, the female subjects grouped

"failing grades" as the most important reason for a student to drop out of school and "Failed the ninth grade proficiency test" as the least important reason. Notice these subjects were not close in the ranking of "The desire to work" with males giving it the rank of one and females the rank of nine. "Failing grades - Failure of courses" was ranked closely with the males having a rank of two and females the rank of one. The male and female subjects agreed upon the least important reason "Failed the ninth grade proficiency test" which is also in agreement with the tenth grade subjects.

#### "Yes," "No," "Maybe" Questionnaire Results

Notice, for the tenth grade subjects the "Yes" response for each reason is about the same percentage as each other reason. The strongest reason was "Failure to see the relevance of education to life" at 35.1 percent. Being "Expelled from school" followed this first one at 32.4 percent while "Pregnancy or fathering a child" was third with 30.6 percent. These were followed by "Teachers do not care" at 27.8 percent and the "Desire to work" at 24.3 percent. Three reasons had the same rate 21.6 percent of being chosen. These reasons were "Failing grades," "Failure to see relevance to life," "Conflict with teacher," and "Plan to take the G.E.D." Having a difficult time learning was next to last at 18.9 percent rate of being chosen and "Failing the ninth grade proficiency test" was last probably due to the fact that most of the tenth grade



students have passed all four parts as shown by 89.2 percent picking the "no" response. The strongest "no" was "Failed the ninth grade proficiency test." Nine of the "no" responses fell between 46 and 64.9 percent which is a range of 18.9 percent. The "maybe" response column had most of the reasons fall in the teens. The strongest "maybe" response was "Have difficulty learning" at 35.1 percent.

#### Semantic Differential Results

Table Five and the stem-and-leaf displays are on the next page. The highest possible sum for a subject would be 50. The lowest possible sum would be 10. The lower the score the more the subject viewed the idea "Dropping out of School" as a positive concept. The higher the score the more the subject viewed "Dropping out of School" as a negative concept. A score of thirty would show that a student is in the middle of the poles.

The tenth grade male subjects had an average sum of 36. This is lower than the entire group average of 38 and the tenth grade female subjects average of 40. The math male subjects had an average sum of 33 which was the lowest sum of the groups. The math female subjects had an average sum of 44 which was the highest of the different groups.

#### Integrated Results of the Three Instruments

To integrate the results of the three instruments, the author went through the rank-order and forced-choice questionnaires and tallied each subjects' rank with the

# STEM-AND-LEAF DISPLAYS

TENTH GRADE MALES				TENTH GRADE FEMALES						
5	0	0	0	5	0	0	0			
4	0	5	6	4	2	5	6	6	7	9
3	0	0	4	4	8					
2	2	7	8	3	3	6	8	8	9	9
1	7			2	4	6	7			
				1						

MATH MALES				MATH FEMALES			
5	0			5	0	0	
4	9			4	6		
3	1	1	9	3	0		
2	4	5		2			
1	9			1			

TABLE FIVE  
RESULTS OF THE SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL

GROUP	X
ALL	38
TENTH MALES	36
TENTH FEMALES	40
MATH MALES	33
MATH FEMALES	44

corresponding "yes," "no," and "maybe" response.

# Rank-Order; Forced Choice Frequency Figure

	YES		NO		MAYBE	
	<u>female</u>	<u>male</u>	<u>female</u>	<u>male</u>	<u>female</u>	<u>male</u>
1	13	9	6	8	6	7
2	11	6	8	12	6	6
3	10	5	12	13	3	6
4	3	2	12	17	10	5
5	6	4	15	17	4	3
6	10	3	14	16	1	5
7	3	4	15	14	7	6
8	5	4	17	17	2	3
9	2	3	19	18	4	3
10	2	3	20	19	3	2

One reason to integrate the results is to check the accuracy of the rank-order questionnaire. Those reasons chosen as yes or maybe should occur closer to the top in the ranking. The subjects' no responses should be further down the ranking. A second reason to integrate the results is to view the data in a different form.

Since some subjects only chose "no" responses or all "no" responses except for one or two "yes" or "maybe" responses, there will be "no" responses at the top of the ranking. It appears that the data seems to move in the expected direction. The female subjects "yes" responses

appear to decrease as one moves down the rank. If a "yes" response appears to look not to be descending, the "maybe" response appears to pick up the "yes"'s slack. For example in rank six, if one adds the "maybe" column to the "yes" column the rank six does not appear out of order. This same phenomenon seems to happen for the male subjects also. The female subjects have the "no" responses decrease as one moves down the ranking. The males seems to head in this direction but not as consistently as the females. Thus, it should make sense where the ranks fall.

The semantic differential was given to determine the subjects' attitude toward the topic. Using the semantic differential, how well can the results be generalized? Fifteen subjects had sums in the thirties. Eight subjects had sums in the twenties and two in the teens. Ten students had a sum of fifty while eleven had sums in the forties.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

In chapter one, the author gave four reasons about why a study should be done on high school dropouts. The first reason was to try and discover information about students still in school since many studies looked at those who dropped out of school. The second reason was that more research needs to be done to determine a way to confront the issue of the dropout more effectively. The third reason was for the author to better understand those students who do not care about good attendance or passing the ninth grade proficiency test because they do not intend to graduate from school. The fourth reason was because the author was curious if proficiency testing would be a reason, but the author was unable to answer this question.

The purpose of this study was to identify the most important factors which may influence secondary students to drop out of school before graduating.

The author did a literature review to become familiar with the topic and used the literature review to determine which reasons to put onto the questionnaires and demographic information sheet. Two questionnaires and one semantic differential were created for this study. One questionnaire asked the subjects to rank ten reasons to drop out of high school from most important to least important using the

numbers one through ten. The other questionnaire asked the subject to think if a given reason would cause him or her to drop out of school and place a check under yes, no or maybe. The third instrument was a semantic differential to try and determine the subjects attitude toward the idea of dropping out of school. The instruments were given to tenth grade students and the author's math one class. They were given to the math one students because many are at risk and to the tenth graders because the literature stated that many dropouts leave in the summer after the tenth grade (Barber & McClellan, 1987).

One purpose of this study was to determine through rank order the strength of the influence of the given reasons. By tallying the "yes," "no," and "maybe" responses to the order of rank, the author noticed that more "yes" responses occurred at the top of the rank and fewer occurred as one moved down through the rank. Thus, the ordering does appear to have significance. The author has determined that the top four of each group seems to be the most influential. The top four rank of each is as follows:

Male tenth grade subjects: have difficulty learning, failure to see the relevance of education to life, teachers do not care and failing grades.

Female tenth grade students: Pregnancy, expelled from school, have difficulty learning, and failing grades.

Male math students: desire to work, failing grades, fathering a child, and expelled from school.

Female math students: failing grades, expelled from school, pregnancy, and conflict with teachers.

For the semantic differential, the first time math subjects had a more negative attitude toward dropping out of school than the third time math subjects. This occurred for both male and female math subjects.

### Conclusions

Since the reasons came from the literature and the instruments were not open to other reasons which might be influential to these subjects, it was not possible for any new reasons to appear as potential factors for students to want to dropout of school. Failing the ninth grade proficiency test was the one reason not found on the instruments from past studies on students who had dropped out of high school. It seems to be a possible factor for a few subjects. Except for a few subjects, most subjects checked at least one reason that would influence them to drop out of school on the "yes", "no," "maybe" questionnaire. This does not mean that the reasons will actually cause them to leave school. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, and Fernandez (1989) stated that each student is different and just because the reasons or causes exist does not mean that they will actually cause them to leave school.

Second, when looking at students who are still in school, one needs to look at the potential reasons for

leaving as well as to see what is holding that student in school. If one knows what is the holding power of the school over the student, this holding power could be increased by manipulation of the situation. The questions to be asked are:

- 1) Why are the students in school?
- 2) Is school relevant to the students needs?
- 3) Why are students motivated to stay in school?
- 4) What external factors keep them in school?

Many of the studies in the literature focus on the student who has dropped out of school. They look at the reasons why students leave school. Those studies which try to prevent students from leaving school look at these previous studies and try to relieve the power of the causes over the student. Perhaps, the focus should be to determine the external factors which keep the student in school and use them to help keep the potential dropout from leaving.

Third, the relevance of our education system needs to be studied. All students don't feel the relevance for school. Thirty-five percent checked "yes" and 10.8 percent checked "maybe" for the tenth grade subjects. Fifteen percent checked "yes" and twenty-three percent checked "maybe" for the math subjects. This shows that students do not know how their education relates to real life. LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) agree and feel all students are at risk. Normal and Gifted students have the same complaints about school as those who drop out. Schools



are "not real assessments of what students think and are like and how schools and society are linked" (p. 55). They continue "school programs and educational policy are "based upon obsolete conceptions of student characteristics, life experiences, family structure, labor market experience, and customary ways of learning" (p. 55).

#### Recommendations

The following suggestions are made for further research.

Several studies could be done on these same students:

- 1) The effect of the new scheduling system, Block Scheduling, on attitude toward dropping out of school.
- 2) The effect of the new computers being placed in the classrooms on dropping out of school.
- 3) At a later time, survey the same students to determine how their responses change over time.
- 4) A study on what external factors keep the students in school.
- 5) Target those potential dropouts and develop an intervention program for each individual situation.

Several other studies could be performed.

- 1) Study could be done on family situations and the family's view upon dropping out of school.
- 2) Study could be done on the relevance of our education system to life.
- 3) Study could be done on the views of teachers toward dropouts and their attitudes toward students.

4) A longitudinal study could be done on a group of potential dropouts to determine their thoughts and feelings about dropping out as they age.

The last recommendation for further research stems from the purpose of this study. The purpose of this study was to identify the most influential dropout reasons. The author determined four influential factors for each group. Future study could be done to determine the level of influence these dropout reasons have on students.

Through this study, the author tried to discover dropout information about students still in school. The author also came to better understand her students who do not care about doing well in school and will try to use the knowledge gained to develop her teaching to make their studies more relevant to their lives.

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors which may influence secondary students to drop out of school before graduating.

Place your name on this page.

NAME:

The information gained from this study will be considered as group data. Thus, no names will be used in the results of the study.

When you are completely finished with the surveys, tear off this page and throw it away.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Miss Broerman

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Appendix B

1) Is it important to you to graduate from high school?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

2) Do your parents

\_\_\_\_\_ want you to finish high school

\_\_\_\_\_ don't care if you do or don't finish high school

\_\_\_\_\_ do not believe that school will help you

3) Do you think you will be able to graduate from high school?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ probably

\_\_\_\_\_ doubtful \_\_\_\_\_ no

4) Do you do your homework

\_\_\_\_\_ very often (five days a week)

\_\_\_\_\_ often (3 - 4 days a week)

\_\_\_\_\_ seldom (1 - 2 days a week)

\_\_\_\_\_ never (zero days a week)

5) Do you have a job outside of school?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

6) If yes, how many hours do you work per week?

7) Have you ever failed or been held back a grade before the seventh grade?

\_\_\_\_\_ none

\_\_\_\_\_ one

\_\_\_\_\_ two or more

8) You are in what grade? \_\_\_\_\_ 9) What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

10) Are you Male? \_\_\_\_\_ or Female? \_\_\_\_\_

11) How many credits have you earned from ninth grade through the first semester of this school year? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

Read through this list of reasons for a student to want to drop out of school. Consider each item. Think to yourself "Could this cause me to want to drop out of high school?" For each item, place a check under yes, no, or maybe.

Reason	yes	no	maybe
1) Desire to work	—	—	—
2) Fail the ninth grade proficiency test	—	—	—
3) Have difficulty learning	—	—	—
4) Failure to see the relevance of education to life	—	—	—
5) Failing grades - Failure of courses	—	—	—
6) Conflict with teachers	—	—	—
7) Teachers do not care	—	—	—
8) Pregnancy or fathering a child	—	—	—
9) Plan to take the G.E.D.	—	—	—
10) Expelled from school	—	—	—

Place in order from most important to least important these reasons why a student would want to drop out of school.

Place a number from 1 through 10 next to each reason.

The number one is the most important reason for a student to want to drop out of high school.

The number ten is the least important reason for a student to want to drop out of high school.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Desire to Work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Failed the ninth grade proficiency test
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have difficulty learning
- \_\_\_\_\_ Failure to see the relevance of education to life
- \_\_\_\_\_ Failing grades - Failure of courses
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conflict with teacher
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers do not care
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pregnancy or fathering a child
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plan to take the G.E.D.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Expelled from school

Rate the concept "Dropping out of High School" according to how you perceive it or feel toward it at the present moment by placing an X somewhere along each of the five scales.

Place the X closer or farther from the word which best describes your thought.

### Dropping Out of High School

Difficult	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Easy
Responsible	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Irresponsible
Unsuccessful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Successful
Wise	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Foolish
Unimportant	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Important
Happy	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Sad
Unpleasant	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Pleasant
Valuable	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Worthless
Complicated	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Simple
Painful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	Pleasurable

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